

Volunteers in Parks



Garry Oak Ecosystems: What are they and why are they so important?

by Nadine Collison

Did you know that Garry oak ecosystems are one of the rarest ecosystems in Canada? In Canada, they are only found in southwestern British Columbia, and only 3% remain in their natural state. Here at the Capital Regional District, we work hard to conserve these precious ecosystems.

Characteristics of Garry Oak Ecosystems:

Garry oak ecosystems are a subset of the Coastal Douglas-fir ecosystem. They are characterized by their namesakes, the Garry oak (also known as Oregon white oak), which is a twisted and gnarled species of oak tree that, in low elevations, grows on dry, rocky slopes and bluffs. Over 100 species of flora and fauna associated with Garry oak ecosystems are considered endangered, extirpated or extinct.

Capital Regional District | Regional Parks

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Garry oak ecosystems contain open forests and meadows with other native trees, such as arbutus and Douglas-fir, and many of you will likely have seen the spring splendor of the native wildflowers at our parks which include: camas, chocolate lily, fawn lily, ocean spray, shooting star and sea blush.

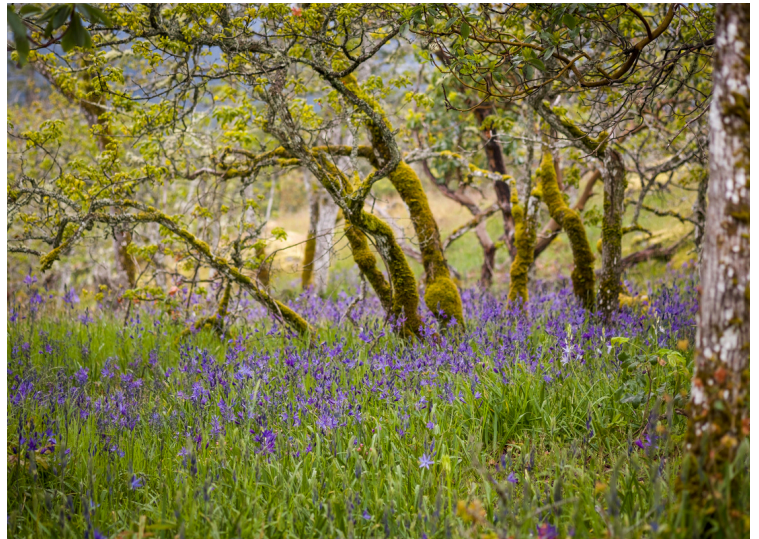
Threats to Garry Oak Ecosystems

Garry oak ecosystems have several threats which have led to their drastic decline:

- **Habitat Loss** – Due to the encroachment of residential, agricultural and other development, Garry oak ecosystems are being destroyed.
- **Invasive Species** – As many of you already know, invasive species, like Scotch broom and Himalayan blackberry, can take over Garry oak ecosystems. Our Restoration Volunteers donate thousands of hours each year helping this rare ecosystem in our regional parks and on regional trails.
- **Fire Suppression** – It's hard to imagine fires being a good thing, but periodic forest fires in the past allowed Garry oak ecosystems to thrive by burning the underbrush but leaving the older, fire-resistant Garry oaks to live.

Where to Find Garry Oak Ecosystems

If you are looking for good examples of Garry Oak Ecosystems, there are plenty in CRD regional parks including Devonian, East Sooke, Francis/King, Mill Hill and Thetis Lake regional parks. There are also many local examples in municipal parks such as Uplands Park (Oak Bay), Christmas Hill (Saanich) and Beacon Hill Park (Victoria) to name a few.



What You Can Do

- **Volunteer:** Each year we have hundreds of restoration volunteers who work to restore Garry oak ecosystems by removing invasive species. If you are not a restoration volunteer, you can add that role by reaching out to Nadine at ncollison@crd.bc.ca
- **Stay On the Trail:** As with all our parks, staying on the trail helps to preserve delicate ecosystems – don't forget to keep your dog on the trail too!
- **Don't Pick the Flowers:** Blooms are necessary for the propagation of more flowers! So please do not pick the flowers and let them spread.
- **Turn Your Yard Back to a Garry oak meadow:** If you have a yard or garden, it may actually be a Garry oak ecosystem, and there is a growing movement returning these yards back to their natural state with meadowscaping you can do yourself. Check out MeadowMakers offered through Satinflower nurseries for local courses and the Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team (www.goert.ca) for free guides and resources.



Photo Credit: Melanie Orr Photography



Photo Credit: Melanie Orr Photography

Trail Care Day 2024: Caring for the Galloping Goose

by Nadine Collison

On June 1st, we were selected by the Trans Canada Trail to host a Trail Care Day celebrating our local stretch of the Trans Canada Trail – which we know as the Galloping Goose Regional Trail - or “the Goose” for those familiar with it.

The Trans Canada Trail (TCT) is the longest trail network in the world! The TCT is a 28,000+ kilometre trail system, connecting 15,000 communities, crossing every province and territory and reaching three coasts!

The Galloping Goose represents 60km of the TCT before it connects to other trails on the island, such as the Cowichan Valley Trail, all weaving up to Nanaimo where it crosses the water back to the mainland and then traversing the entire country. It truly is an amazing feat!

Along with nine other communities across the country, we co-hosted Trail Care Day events with the Trans Canada Trail. At the south end of the Selkirk Trestle, the public were invited to do litter-clean up or participate in one of two restoration events where we removed invasive species along the trail. Our Cultural Programmer, Leslie McGarry, was present for a self-guided cultural interpretive walk along with several booths for the CRD and the TCT. There was also a large activation wall (a billboard with a map of the TCT) where visitors could post a note telling us what they love about the TCT.

Thank you to the Trans Canada Trail for allowing us to be part of this event - I’m sure we can all agree that we feel blessed to have such a wonderful trail in our region.

Biodiversity Heroes: Creating the Next Generation of Stewards

by Emma Jane Vignola

In the spring, the naturalist and conservation teams at Regional Parks teamed up to offer a new pilot school program called 'Biodiversity Heroes!'

Teachers booked the program for their Grade 4-5 students and visited Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park to learn about invasive plants and participate in their removal within the park.

The program started by exploring the trails and learning about native plants and the vital roles they play in sustaining a healthy ecosystem. There were some games and activities like 'invasive species freeze tag' to teach students what an invasive species is, the impacts they have on the local environment, and the importance of biodiversity in a healthy ecosystem.

Students participated in a friendly competition each session, trying to pull the longest piece of ivy. One group of students pulled a single strand measuring 30ft!



Then came the 'hero' part as students rolled up their sleeves to remove English Ivy. The students loved breaking into teams and competing to see who could remove the longest strand of English Ivy! This was a fun way to encourage students to slow down and be careful as they enjoyed hands-on learning while making a tangible contribution to the health of the park.

The program was developed this past winter by Park Naturalist, Emma Jane Vignola with feedback and support from the rest of the naturalist team. The program was led jointly with naturalist and conservation staff including Stewardship Technician, Jake Stead.

Although this was the first season we have offered the program, it was a big hit with teachers, students, and staff alike, and we're looking forward to continuing offering the program in the future as part of the naturalist team's yearly school programs!

Staff Profile: Olga Tkachenko - Restoration Assistant



Olga has been a Restoration Assistant since 2022

Tell us a bit about yourself

After completing a Bachelor of Science in Biology in 2013, I worked as an apiary assistant on beekeeping operations in the Canadian prairies for five seasons. I completed my Bachelor of Science in Nursing in 2018 and have since worked full-time as a nurse. These days, I divide my time between a full-time job immunizing military members at CFB Esquimalt, studying in the Restoration of Natural Systems program at UVic, and removing invasive plants with CRD volunteer groups. In my spare time, you can find me riding my bike with my partner, starting new craft projects (and not necessarily finishing them), and reading.

What do you most enjoy about working in regional parks?

I started off as a volunteer with Regional Parks when I first moved to Victoria in 2021. It was a great way to explore and get to know the plant communities and ecosystems in the area, and to meet some lovely local people!

One of the aspects I most enjoy is working with both long-term volunteers and folks that are new to the program. Participating in the program as a volunteer and now staff has helped me feel more of a sense of belonging in my new home! I also value the constant learning. The volunteers and other staff teach me so much about local plants, restoration, and invasive plant management.



Park Safety: Fire Safety in Parks

by John Kang

Having had Canada's worst fire season in 2023, wildfire concern heightens as summer starts. Although that does not mean we cannot enjoy nature, we can take steps to stop unintentional human caused wildfires. Below are safety precautions to follow or to research more when preparing for this year's fire season to be as fire safe as possible.

One of the best ways to report a wildfire is through the BC Wildfire app. This allows you to report directly to the BC Wildfire Centre without a phone call, where personnel can immediately receive the information and dispatch the appropriate amount of help. You can submit photos and answer questions on the fire's size, direction, and potential spread. They may call you back to clarify your report. Download the BC Wildfire app on your phone to support yourself and your community. In case you do not have the app, you can also call 1.800.663.5555, *5555 from a cell phone, or 911.

To prevent unwanted fires in the first place, make sure to regularly follow local and regional fire bans, as well as be aware of modes of potential ignition or spread. Examples of potential ignition include open burning, lanterns, fireworks, and discarded burning items like cigarettes (although smoking is prohibited in all CRD Regional Parks and Trails). If open burning is allowed, burn in designated fire pits – generally only 0.5m high by 0.5m wide and at least 3m from vegetation. Be sure to completely put out fires whenever unattended. You can also look into FireSmarting your home by following the [BC FireSmart Begins at Home Manual](#).

In case of a smoke event, limit smoke coming into your home by closing all windows and vents. When going outside, you can also use certified masks (e.g. N95) to reduce the amount of inhaled smoke particles.



During a wildfire, it is important to stay calm and have all essential gear ready to go in your emergency kit, this can even include ensuring you always have enough fuel in your vehicle.

One last reminder is that fire season generally lasts until the end of September and sometimes even into October depending on the year. Stay diligent in being fire smart and be safe this fire season when enjoying CRD regional parks.

More Information:

[Wildfire - Get Prepared](#) by the Government of Canada

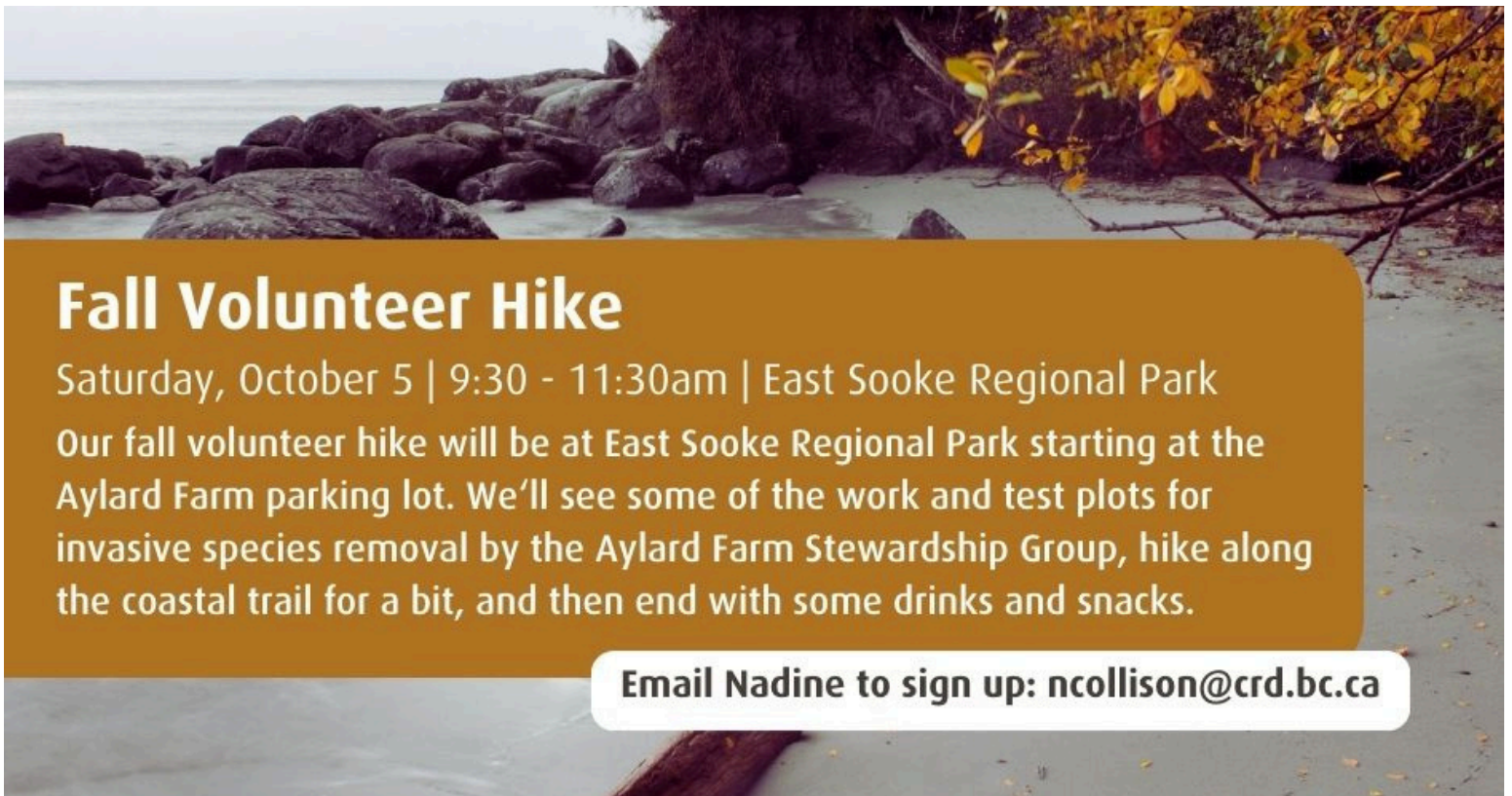
[Wildfires](#) by the CRD

[FireSmart Begins at Home](#) by BC Wildfire Service

[Open Burning](#) by the Government of British Columbia



Upcoming Events & Learning Opportunities



Fall Volunteer Hike

Saturday, October 5 | 9:30 - 11:30am | East Sooke Regional Park

Our fall volunteer hike will be at East Sooke Regional Park starting at the Aylard Farm parking lot. We'll see some of the work and test plots for invasive species removal by the Aylard Farm Stewardship Group, hike along the coastal trail for a bit, and then end with some drinks and snacks.

Email Nadine to sign up: ncollison@crd.bc.ca